

A FEARFUL NIGHT.

Why a Beautiful Young Lady Had Perfectly White Hair When Scarcely Out of Her Teens.

I was invited to a lunch party in one of the inland cities of Pennsylvania, not long ago, and was much impressed by the appearance of one of the younger ladies present. She was not beautiful, but united the striking characteristics of a brilliant fresh complexion and a profusion of hair, white as snow, which was wound on the top of her head after the fashion of Madrazo's "Marquise," belonging to Mrs. A. T. Stewart. She was very merry, a good talker, and I must confess, I contrived to occupy the larger part of her attention, with that tendency towards monopolizing the best which the moment afforded that I am told is often observed by my familiars.

After bidding adieu to the ladies, I turned to the obliging friend who had been my sponsor at these incidental gaieties of —, and casually remarked, after talking somewhat of my new acquaintance:

"By Jove, what hair! It accents her whole appearance. Wasn't she lucky to achieve it young?"

"That depends on how you look at it. I am inclined to think, taking things by and large, that she was. I doubt, however, if she wouldn't say to-day that the price was rather large. And it was a pretty big price. Do you like stories? I'm minded to tell you one, if you like, about that white hair you admire so much."

We went over to the hotel, and something like this my friend told me:

You have no idea, you city people, the interest we country people take in the courtships of young folks. From the time Harry Wells began to slide up to Mamie Clausen at church socials until their marriage in the Presbyterian Church, the entire community gave minute consideration to their affairs.

Mamie's father, John Clausen, was and is now a prominent commission merchant, generally considered wealthy, and has always lived at least like a man of means. Mamie was pretty, dashing, a local belle and a great favorite. Harry's family lived a few miles from town, and they, too, are people of reputation in the county. Old Jack Wells represented a few times in the Legislature, and has accumulated in one way and another a handsome property.

The marriage was in every way a suitable one. Harry was educated at Princeton, and although he had at one time the reputation of being wild, he sobered down, and was at any rate such a frank, manly young fellow that he was generally forgiven any indiscretion.

As I say, the marriage was the occasion of general rejoicing. Mamie's father gave her an unusually good send-off, and the details were sent far and wide through the State. Harry had studied law, although he didn't have much natural inclination for it, the old man thinking his political experience might serve Harry in that way, and had settled down into a country notary, drawing up deeds and doing back-work of that sort. They lived about four miles out of town, two miles from old Jack's. He had built them a pretty modern cottage on a detached portion of his farm. Harry had his office, an ornamental little structure, a few rods from the house, and there they lived as happy as two birds.

Gradually Harry picked up business, and finally, through his father, became trustee for the minor heirs. They were an odd lot of children, with a half-crazy mother and no end of coal lands and mining investments. It was a good thing for Harry, although it gave a naturally lazy man some additional work. The worst thing was that it obliged him to go to Scranton now and then and leave Mamie. You may imagine that there was a good deal of visiting at the house of two such popular young people, and that four-mile stretch of road was generally kept pretty warm. When Harry had to go away, Mamie would get in her phaeton and drive to town, and there was always some of the young people ready to go out and keep her company. Harry always insisted that she mustn't stay alone. For a law-abiding State we have a pretty rough element in it, and although we haven't had much to complain of here, there is a general sense of uneasiness.

One August afternoon Harry had an unexpected summons to go to Scranton about a suit connected with the minor heirs. He had recently sold some of their property and had been making various collections, which left in his hands about \$4,500. When he found he had to go off at a few moments' notice, he wrapped up a bundle of papers and his money, and took them into the house. Mamie was making preparations for a picnic they were to go to the next day, and begged him to wait until the day after.

"But, my dear child, I haven't time even to go to town and put these in the bank, so you'll have to take care of them. I'll try and get back in two days at the furthest; meanwhile no body will know that the money is here."

Then he explained to her the value of the papers and handed her a canvas bag, in which was the \$4,500 belonging to the minor heirs.

"Where will I keep it, Harry? Between the mattresses?"

"Just like a woman. No. But I declare I don't know where to tell you. The most insecure place apparently is often the most secure. Any place, dear, but between the mattresses. I leave that to you. But you must guard it, if necessary, with your life, for remember the money is not ours, and at all hazards I am responsible. I don't really suppose there is the least danger, for no one knows I have it. But one ought to take proper precautions, and I beg of you not to admit any tramps while I am gone. Tell Sarah not even to allow them to stop long enough to eat a biscuit."

"All right, dear; we won't let the tramps have a drink even, and I'll take care of the money, you may be sure."

Harry bade his wife good-bye and Mamie gave up the picnic. At the end of two days she received a telegram from him, saying he had been detained, and telling her to get some one to stay with her for two days, when he would be at home. She drove into town and one of her old friends went out with her. At the end of two days she had another telegram saying he was detained until the next day. Her friend went home, and in place of Harry came a third tele-

gram, and so every day for ten days he was expected home, and every day came a disappointing telegram. By this time she had become accustomed to her charge, which she had set, like a bag of seed-beans in a corner of a dark closet opening from her room.

The afternoon of the tenth day was a hot, murky afternoon. Mamie had gone upstairs to take a nap and refresh before dressing to meet Harry, who was expected home after the longest absence he had ever made from her.

After a time Sarah came up and told her there was a tramp down stairs who wanted something to eat and who wouldn't be driven off.

"You oughtn't to leave him a minute alone, Sarah. Go down and watch him, and I will come down and send him off."

She dressed herself quickly and went down stairs, surprised to find how late it had grown. When she reached the kitchen she found another messenger with another disappointing telegram, but the next day without fail, Harry wrote he would be home. As Mamie turned into the kitchen she heard the tramp and Sarah in evident dispute.

"Yes," said the fellow, "when that time comes, your mistress will have another ironing-table, helping you, instead of wearing her Sunday clothes every day."

"An' spoilin' everything for me to do over. I think I see her. I've work enough to do," answered honest Sarah, not indisposed to have a chat over her work.

Mamie found a graceless-looking fellow, unshaven and ill-dressed, with a certain gentlemanly instinct, rose up as she came in.

"I suppose my girl told you we had nothing for you, and that it will be a great kindness if you will leave as soon as possible."

"Yes, she did just that, madam, but I took it upon myself to believe it wasn't so urgent. The truth is, I'm very hungry and dead tired, and I don't believe but that you would give me something to eat, least I've waited to ask you in person."

Woman are soft-headed creatures. Mamie went and got him something to eat, herself. The darkness that had been increasing for some time came down rapidly, and there burst one of those terrific thunder-storms that gather so suddenly and with such force in this country. After its strength was spent—and I remember that it was the most violent of the season—there fell steady sheets of rain that brought Rock creek over the bridges before morning.

"Madam, it's no use talking. You can't mean to send a fellow out in such a storm," said the tramp as the three stood on the porch watching the storm.

"I'm sorry, but I've no place for you."

"What, in a house like this. It's a pity there isn't a cranny for a stow-away. I was walking around it, waiting for the girl, and it seemed to me it ought to be able to hold three people."

"You are very impertinent. I tell you I have no place for you, and the storm is already breaking away."

As she spoke even the rain came down in blinding sheets, and lightning streaked the heavens.

"Well," he said, carelessly, "we don't go much on manners on the road, but I know I wouldn't send a dog out such a night as this. I'm not a particular chap, leastwise not nowadays, and I'll have to insist on your giving me some sort of shelter, if it's only your dog-kennel."

The man spoke with decision. Mamie felt that, after all, they were really in his power, and possibly it might be worth while to do civilly what she would probably have to do at last.

"I will keep you on one condition," she said. "There is a loft to the house, a sort of garret, which is very comfortable. It is closed with a trap-door, and you may sleep on the lounge there if you will allow us to lock the door on the outside."

"Bless my stars and garters!" he said looking at her curiously. "I don't care when you lock the door."

They took him up stairs, and he climbed up the steep attic stairs. The woman shut the door as he politely bade them good-night, and they fastened the padlock, hearing him chuckle to himself as he kicked off his boots.

"I'd take the key, mum said Sarah. Mamie took the key with her, and the two descended to shut up the house. After they had made everything secure, they went back up stairs.

"You must sleep in my room to-night, Sarah," the mistress said. Sarah dragged in her bedding, and made a pallet on the floor, and then, after the custom of women, they examined the closets, looked under the bed and piled the chairs against the locked door. The rain was still falling heavily, and the night black as ink. The mistress and maid went to bed, and although worried and anxious, finally went to sleep.

After midnight Mamie found herself awake and a bright light shining in the room. She started up and saw that the moonlight, the storm had cleared away at last. She got up, unable to compose herself immediately, and went to the window. The moon was indeed shining brightly. As she stood looking at the peaceful scene before her, she saw way down the road, for it was as bright as day, several horsemen. It was such an unusual sight at this hour that she stood watching them as they came nearer. To her surprise they turned up the lane leading towards their house and on reaching the gate came into the yard. Now, almost paralyzed with fear, she saw that they were masked. The truth almost blinded her. They knew that she was alone, that she had this money, and they had come to get it. For a moment she was paralyzed. She remembered Harry's last words: "You must guard it with your life, if necessary."

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